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SUBJECT: ELECTION OF NEW GREEN PARTY CO-LEADER UNLIKELY TO HERALD
SEA CHANGE IN POLICIES

11. (SBU) Summary: Nearly eight months after the death of co-leader Rod Donald, the Green Party has chosen Russel Norman as his replacement. Elected by delegates at the party's annual conference, Norman will share the leadership with Jeannette Fitzsimons, who was re-elected female co-leader for the 12th time. Norman's election is a victory for traditional Green Party principles. Although the conference signaled that the Greens are open to working with National in the future, most analysts agree this was likely to strengthen the Party's negotiating leverage with Labour and not a signal of a significant change in policies.

The background of the new co-leader

12. (SBU) Norman, 39, was born in Brisbane, Australia. He immigrated to New Zealand in 1997 to study the Alliance Party, a now disbanded political coalition of leftist and Green parties. He wrote his political science PhD thesis on the Alliance, and was active within the party editing its party newsletter. He soon became actively involved in the Auckland branch of the Green Party working as an assistant to Green MPs Sue Kedgley, Nandor Tanczos, and Keith Locke. Norman was a researcher for the party from 2002 to 2004 and was the national campaign manager prior to the 2005 election and the national Party Development Co-coordinator afterwards.

New co-leader will not sit in Parliament

13. (SBU) Norman is not a current MP and therefore will take up the co-leadership from a position outside Parliament. Co-leader Fitzsimons is a current MP and has a seat in Parliament. The Green Party charter stipulates that the party leadership must be shared by a male and a female. Norman has stated that he will concentrate on party building and community work. He has announced his intention to stand for Parliament on the party list at the next election.

14. (SBU) Although he will not serve in Parliament, Norman is no stranger to parliamentary politics. During the last parliamentary term, he surreptitiously drafted parliamentary questions for Green MPs and attended meetings with them. He also provided advice on parliamentary strategy.

Greens look to fix its electoral prospects

15. (SBU) While no polling on the impact of Norman's election is

currently available, the Greens have been under-performing in the polls of late. The Greens' political influence has also waned since it had its parliamentary representation slashed from nine MPs to six MPs at the last election and is no longer a coalition partner with the Government. Norman has stated that he hopes his election will boost Green Party support in suburbs, provincial areas and towns around New Zealand, in addition to attracting a greater share of the youth vote.

But not its policy positions

16. (SBU) The election of Norman is unlikely to greatly alter the party's politics or approach to politics. By all accounts, the new co-leader is a traditional Green. Norman has identified the established issues of climate change, public transport, declining oil resources, healthy food, healthy rivers and low wages as ones he intends to pursue. His election is a victory for the traditional left-leaning wing of the party, who fought off a co-leadership challenge by Tanczos. Tanczos wanted to move the Green Party to a position where it could bridge the Left-Right political divide.

17. (SBU) Norman has maintained that under his co-leadership the party will continue to take an independent and principled position, working with all political parties issue by issue. He and others at the conference signaled that the Greens could even relax their long-held aversion to working with the right-of-center National Party if the Nats change their climate change policy. However, given the selection of the traditionally Green Norman as leader, most analysts see this move as a tactic of political leveraging rather than a moderation of the Party's beliefs. After the last election, Labour was forced to reach out to United Future and NZ First in order to gain a working governing arrangement, and both parties refused to agree to a deal unless the Greens were left out of the picture. By making it clear it would not ally with National

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under any circumstances, the Greens were left vulnerable. Meanwhile, it remains to be seen whether the National Party would even be interested in working with the Greens. It could be a valuable way for the Nats to reach a less mainstream audience. However, they may decide that the possible cost in core support could be too heavy a price to pay.

McCormick